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ABSTRACT

An overview is presented of the "Skills for Ethical Action" (SEA) instructional materials relative to other instructional approaches in the field of moral/values/ethical education, and information about anticipated learner outcomes is offered. The program is intended for junior high school students. Several major existing thecretical positions on moral education and values education are briefly described, followed by an explanation of how SEA is distinct from them. SEA's uniqueness rests on the program's emphasis on behavior. The objective is to teach a process for acting ethically and to help students internalize the process so that they consciously use it in daily life. This objective is accomplished through skill training which stresses identification of component skills and emphasizes behavioral outcomes. The six-step strategy employed by the materials is outlined. It combines ethical decision making, action consistent with self-held values, and evaluation. Instructional design of the four units is described next. The units exhibit a progression in complexity from simulation to active assertion of values, and from a sense of personal friends to regard for others beyond the personal sphere. Final sections discuss reading level and remedial activities, explain how SEA relates to other curriculum, and provide an annotated bibliography of six relevant books. (Author/AV)

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AN INTRODUCTION TO

SKILLS FOR ETHICAL ACTION

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AN INTRODUCTION TO

SKILLS FOR ETHICAL ACTION

The functions of this Introduction are: (1) to provide an overview of the Skills for Ethical Action (SEA) instructional materials relative to other instructional approaches in the field of moral/values/ethical education, and (2) to offer information regarding the learner outcomes which may be anticipated as a result of the instruction. The instructional design of the materials is briefly described and the particulars of the specific units outlined. Instructional considerations such as reading levels and remedial activities are noted. Bridges for integrating the instruction into ongoing social studies or language arts programs are described. In closing, some readings are suggested for the person who wishes to learn more about the moral/values/ethical education field.

Although instruction in "morals" has a long history in American education, many shifts in interpretation of what that instruction should or might consist of have occurred. Recent polls and surveys have registered a general consensus among Americans that education in morals/values/ethics is a proper, indeed a most necessary, function of the public school. What that education should comprise, however, has not been so clearly mandated.

There are several major existing theoretical positions which influenced recent educational endeavors in the moral/ethical domain. Most of these efforts can be classified as either "moral education" or "values education." The SEA materials do not fall into either class. However, the classes are briefly described below by way of introduction and in an effort to indicate just where the SEA materials do fit relative to these positions. Quite obviously the descriptions must be succinct and are therefore simplifications. The Suggested Reading section of this paper contains references to selections which give full accounts of the positions noted here.

"Moral education" refers to education related to rights and wrongs in behavior. Lawrence Kohlberg of Harvard University is the most well-known name associated with "moral education." His major contribution is a stage theory of moral development. He has conducted research attempting to establish the invariance and universality of the sequence of the six stages he describes and has presented arguments to support the philosophical soundness of his theory of morality. Many educational efforts based on the Kohlberg stage theory involve presentation of hypothetical or factual dilemma stories which are discussed in terms of what the character(s) should do and why. The teacher guides the discussion so that students are exposed to stages of reasoning immediately above that of the students which will stimulate them to this higher level. Thus the instructional goal is to dispose the student to make moral judgments on the basis of more sufficient reasoning.

Another approach to "moral education" may be typed as one of inculcation. Several curricula offer development of concepts about honesty, kindness and other traditional virtues. Often rule-giving or exhortation is the method used, although one effort leads the students through a process utilizing the traditional virtues to solve everyday problems.

"Values education" refers to education concerning modes of action and/or states of existence that are held to be important. The values considered include not only issues of right and wrong, but also values associated with achievement, independence, status, power, affection, pleasure, etc. The educational orientation best known is Values Clarification and the names associated with it are Louis Raths, Merrill Harmin, Sidney Simon, and Howard Kirschenbaum. Through a variety of structured exercises students are encouraged to identify and become aware of their own system of values, concentrating on what "is" rather than what "ought" to be. This valuing is a process of self-actualization involving choosing freely from among alternatives, reflecting on the consequences of those alternatives, and prizing, affirming and acting upon one's choices. One's values are considered the result of the process. The individual decides which values are positive and which are negative. The experiencing of the clarification process is thought to lead to an expansion of self-awareness.

The Skills for Ethical Action program does not fall into either of the two classes sketched above. It is not directed at influencing moral reasoning and does not teach specific

values. Nor is its primary aim self-actualization. Although elements from both classes have been synthesized into the instruction, the program itself is unique in both objective and technique. This uniqueness rests on the program emphasis on behavior. The objective is to teach a process for acting ethically and to dispose the individual to consciously use this process in daily life. This objective is accomplished through skill training which stresses identification of component skills and emphasizes behavioral outcomes. The course materials teach a six-step strategy outlined below, which combines ethical decision-making, action consistent with self-held values, and evaluation. Acting consistently with self-held values is not an indication of value relativism, however. The process which is taught is itself a translation of component skills and attitudes determined to be sufficient for ethical action. Thus the basic skills and attitudes which are the foci across the strategy include awareness of others' values and points of view as well as awareness of one's own values; showing a belief that all other persons have rights, concerns and values which are equally as important as one's own; objectivity toward relevant facts; and ability to act upon one's decisions. Finally, the results of particular decisions and the related actions are examined in evaluative activity which prompts the individual to formulate particular principles either to behave or not to behave in the same manner when faced with similar life situations. It is the reciprocity of decision-making and action with the assessment features of the process which fosters development of individual principles consistent with the components of ethicality.

The heart of the SEA program is the six-step strategy described below.

Step 1: Identify the Value Problem

In this step the students describe the situation that presents a problem or that indicates they are not doing enough to show that one of their values is meaningful. They name their value which is involved and then formally state their value problem.

Step 2: Think up Action Ideas

This step asks the students to brainstorm ideas for actions that might help them handle their problem. Then the students check their action ideas to make sure that they are stated specifically and that they are possible for the students to do.

Step 3: Consider Self and Others

In this step the students think about how their action ideas might affect their own values, feelings, health and safety, and possessions. They get information about how others might be affected in these four areas by these action ideas. The students also think of what the general effects of their actions might be.

Step 4: Judge

The fourth step asks the students to be objective as they review and summarize the information gathered in Step 3, in order to judge whether their actions would be ethical. They then change or reject those actions which they deem not ethical.

Step 5: Act

In this step the students choose one of their actions they deemed ethical and make a commitment to carry out that action.

They are also called upon to persevere until the action is completed.

Step 6: Evaluate

In the final step of the strategy the students examine the action they have completed and ask themselves whether it was indeed ethical. They review how well they used each step of the strategy and consider the importance to them now of the value which they acted upon.

I. INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

The objective of the Skills for Ethical Action instructional materials is to teach skills relevant to acting ethically and to dispose the individual to consciously use these skills in daily life. In this section we will explicate what this "teaching" involves and how the instruction is designed to accomplish acquisition of the necessary skills.

The core of the instruction is contained in the first unit. Here, in the definition of ethical action and through the examination of the key concepts related to "self, others, and fairness," the students are presented with the concepts and the outcomes of implementing these concepts in what is at once the most complex form and yet the simplest. As the instruction proceeds, the concepts, operations and applications are elaborated with dimensions which modify or enlarge the complete form as presented initially. New skills are offered and old ones reinforced in order to achieve objectives and effect an increase in the potential for personal application.

As you read the brief description of the course which offers specifics about each unit, keep in mind the elaboration schema mentioned above. Also, note the growing complexity of application from simulation through dealing with problem situations to seeking ways to actively assert personally held values. The other dimension of increasing complexity is the gradual introduction of an expanded sense of others from friends and family to other people beyond the student's immediate contacts.

In addition, the students are led in consideration of their values from personal preferences to an expanded knowledge of general value categories and an awareness that they can make their values meaningful in their lives.

A description of each unit of the course is given below.

UNIT I: Ethical Action -- What, Why and How

Ten lessons. Key concepts and definitions are introduced. Reasons for wanting to act ethically are presented. Roles of self-knowledge and caring in leading to consideration of self and others are examined. The six-step strategy leading to ethical action is introduced.

UNIT II: Using the Strategy with Pete, Diane, Andrea and Jack

Eleven lessons. Concepts introduced in Unit I are reviewed and linked to strategy steps. Students practice using strategy steps in a simulation game involving case studies of teenagers holding specified values. Role-taking skills and decision-making skills are introduced and practiced.

UNIT III: Using the Strategy with Your Own Value Problem

Nine lessons. Students expand knowledge of their own values by ranking general value terms. They then use the strategy to deal with a problem arising in their own lives from a situation involving one of their values. Further practice in application of skills introduced earlier is provided as reinforcement. Emphasis is on use of substeps subsumed under each of the strategy steps.

UNIT IV: Using the Strategy to Help You Act on Your Values

Eight lessons. Students review the key concepts introduced in Unit I and relate them to the strategy as a whole. Students use the strategy to make one of their own values more meaningful in their lives. The concept of "others" is expanded to include persons beyond those immediately and obviously involved. Students project future circumstances in which they might use the strategy.

As noted in the unit descriptions above, the course encourages students to apply the course-taught skills to real situations in their own lives. In other words, the students are asked to personalize the materials. This personalization is more real and more effective in demonstrating the process if the classroom is one in which students feel safe enough to share their honest feelings or opinions or to refuse to share if the information is too personal. Therefore, a classroom atmosphere that fosters respect for the individual privacy of each student is necessary in order to fully realize the objectives of the Ethical Action course.

II. INSTRUCTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Reading level. The Skills for Ethical Action course does not require a great deal of reading on the part of the students. The study book and worksheets which students use in the lessons contain only brief paragraphs or short case studies. These materials have been geared to a grade 5 or 6 reading level. This does not mean, however, that the course is designed for use in remedial classes. Rather, it is aimed at the average junior high classroom. The new words or words above grade level that are introduced in the course are defined and explained in context in the lesson. In addition, these words are defined in the Word List on the back of each unit divider page in the study book.

Remedial activities. Some students have difficulty mastering certain concepts. The teacher is advised that he or she may repeat the exercises provided in the lesson or devise similar exercises. Remedial exercises are provided following some lessons which deal with concepts that prior to this revised version of the course a number of students have found difficult.

Absentees. The SEA course is sequential; so if students miss one or more lessons, it is necessary that they be given an opportunity to study the material they missed. Suggestions for handling this are provided in the Teacher's Manual.

Individual lessons. Each lesson begins with a review, at the cognitive level, of concepts learned previously. The assumption is that the students must know a concept or skill -- have a handle on it, so to speak -- before they can be disposed to use it. Most of the lessons also include an experiential activity

as well as an activity that seeks to help the students personalize what they have learned. All lessons end with a summary of material covered or an exercise asking for recall of the basic lesson objective(s).

Time. The SEA course consists of 38 lessons designed to be presented sequentially, meaning that all of the material should be presented to the students in the order in which it is given in the program. The course has been designed in the present fashion in order to systematically develop the skill and dispositional objectives as stated, so that lessons or parts of lessons should not be omitted or the order rearranged. The time a teacher chooses to spend on an activity or a lesson, however, often may be varied to meet the needs of a particular class. Each lesson should take approximately thirty minutes if the teacher adheres to the time limits suggested in the Teacher's Manual for activities and discussions.

Unit tests. Scoring keys are provided for the individual unit tests so that the teacher may check student progress in mastering the course objectives. This also enables the teacher to provide students with feedback and to use the test information as inputs in grading, if this is desired. It also provides a method for holding the students accountable for the course.

III. SEA RELATIVE TO OTHER CURRICULUM

The Skills for Ethical Action instruction need not be considered as a separate entity in a grade level's curriculum. There are many natural carry-overs or bridges to programs in

social studies or language arts that are mutually reinforcing and helpful. Three approaches at linking or integrating the SEA materials into the general instructional program are outlined briefly below. Detailed suggestions for implementing each approach are provided in the Teacher's Manual.

The approaches suggested are (1) the component skills, dispositions and concepts approach, (2) the case study approach, and (3) a curriculum planning approach.

Component skills approach. Although SEA focuses on skills as a means and not an end, it does offer instruction and practice in skills, dispositions and concepts which have useful application in areas outside of the strategy. These skills, dispositions, and concepts may be grouped in two functional categories: (1) class management (climate, discipline) and (2) academics.

The "class management" category includes suggestions such as, enforcing the use of course-given listening skills in all class discussions. The "academics" category includes such suggestions as having the students apply the specificity criteria (details that tell "what, where and/or when") when writing reports or answers to reading assignments.

Case study approach. Certainly any topic or unit of study in social studies or language arts has some real or hypothetical value problem for class discussion and study. For example, in history the students might be asked to apply the strategy to problems like the following: Should John Doe, a printer apprentice, join the Boston Tea Party? Or, had you been Socrates, would you have chosen death over compromising your values? In social science,

the problem might be: If you were a town councilperson, would you allow a potential archaeological site to be sold to contrators for a needed housing development? Current events, novels, short stories, or even situations at school are full of opportunities to use the SEA strategy. By doing so, the teacher not only reinforces the learning of the strategy, but can also get students to better understand, empathize with, and analyze issues and people in the regular content areas.

Practice in basic skills may be combined with practice in using the strategy. For example, the students might be asked to read certain selections to get suggestions for action ideas, draw a map showing places related to their ideas, use three sources for information about possible effects of their actions, write a letter to someone, and so on.

Curriculum planning approach. The third way to carry the SEA program over into the regular course of study is for the teacher to use the curriculum design of the SEA materials as a model for developing his or her own units.

The SEA program contains many examples of sound curriculum practices that may be useful in any course of study. These include such items as giving behavioral objectives for each lesson, using a wide variety of instructional methods, and having the students monitor and evaluate their own work.

IV. SUGGESTED READING

Literally thousands of articles, books and other documents concerning moral/values/ethical education have been published

in recent years. As a part of the research connected with developing SEA materials, much of this literature was collected, reviewed and classified by the staff at Research for Better Schools, Inc. The bibliography which resulted from this effort is referenced below together with several articles and books which we selected in the belief that they offer some sound basic reading in the field.

Hall, Robert T. and Davis, John U. Moral Education in Theory and Practice. Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1975.

Provides a general introduction to the domain and offers an examination of some major theorists and programs in moral education highlighting the scope and nature of their differences.

Klafter, Marcia B. and Wallace, Joan D. A Bibliography of Moral/Values Education. Philadelphia, Pa. Research for Better Schools, Inc., 1976.

Contains over 1800 citations of articles, books and curriculum materials published between 1960-1975 in the area of moral/values education. The documents cited are classified by type and content.

Kohlberg, Lawrence. "The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Moral Education." Phi Delta Kappan, 56 (1975): 670-677.

A detailed presentation of Kohlberg's theory of moral development and its implications for education.

Raths, Louis E.; Harmin, Merrill; and Simon, Sidney. Values and Teaching: Working with Values in the Classroom. Columbus,

Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1966.

The authors explain their theory of values, discuss guidelines and problems of the approach, and review earlier research on values clarification.

Superka, Douglas P. and Johnson, Patricia L. with Ahrens, Christine. Values Education: Approaches and Materials. Boulder, Colo.: ERIC Clearing house for Social Studies/Social Science Education and Social Science Education Consortium, Inc., 1975.

A classification scheme for five approaches to values education is explained and exemplified with analyses of some existing programs.

Wilson, John; Williams, Norman; and Sugarman, Barry. Introduction to Moral Education. Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1967.

Originator of a major effect in moral education in England, Wilson brings a philosophical, rather than psychological, thrust to his view of curriculum. His views in communicating a rational method for developing principles of moral/ethical behavior have strongly influenced the basic concepts of Skills for Ethical Action materials.